



Welcoming and Serving Children from Immigrant and Refugee Families

**A TOOLKIT TO SUPPORT WISCONSIN
SCHOOL DISTRICTS**

February 2022

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

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Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

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February 2022

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

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Introduction

Each year, children and families from around the globe enroll in Wisconsin public schools after immigrating to and resettling in our state. Many of these children and families are refugees who have fled their home countries for a variety of reasons, including persecution, violence, or natural disasters. Students from immigrant and refugee families bring a wealth of assets that benefit their classmates, schools, and communities, as well as themselves. At the same time, students from immigrant and refugee families may face unique challenges related to language, interrupted schooling, trauma, and more. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has developed this toolkit to support school leaders around the state as they welcome, enroll, serve, and embrace students and families who are immigrants and refugees.

Purpose and Audience

Local education agencies (LEAs) must provide all students with a free public education, regardless of immigration or refugee status, and the resources within the toolkit are intended to support school districts in meeting these obligations. The toolkit reviews effective strategies and resources designed to support leadership at the district and school levels in delivering an equitable and excellent education to all students.

In particular, the toolkit is intended to:

- Refresh and remind school and district leaders of key federal and state laws and regulations, civil rights, and other relevant case law, as well as other requirements.
- Provide a quick reference for tools and resources designed for districts, schools, and educators to support students from immigrant and refugee families as they resettle into local communities and school districts.
- Share best practices and considerations around family engagement to ensure immigrant and refugee families are involved in meaningful ways and are active partners in key educational decisions about their children. Such collaborative partnering is critical to students' academic and social-emotional success.
- Provide school and district leaders with best practices and considerations for welcoming and serving children from immigrant and refugee families over the immediate-, short-, and long-term. DPI will continue to work with schools and families to build these resources and enrich the toolkit over time.
- Support districts in their pursuit of creating learning environments that are culturally and linguistically responsive and centered in equity.

Guiding Principles and Mindsets

As state and local educational agencies, it is our legal obligation to provide all students, regardless of immigration or refugee status, with a free public education and to ensure all students access the programs and services to which they are entitled. In order for all students to reach their full potential, we must work together to welcome and embrace all students and families; recognize and foster the unique gifts, assets, and talents they bring to our schools and communities; and support them in any way possible as we strive to ensure each child receives an excellent and equitable Wisconsin education.

In that spirit, DPI offers the following guiding principles and mindsets to consider when welcoming and serving children and families who are immigrants and refugees:

Guiding Principles:

- **Center Equity:** To meet the needs of all students, begin with those whose needs are most likely to be overlooked or misunderstood. By keeping their needs central, you can design systems, processes, and environments that support all students. Meeting the needs of every student is the work, not something extra.
- **Cultivate Welcoming and Belonging:** Embrace our families and communities for who they are and center their cultures, languages, and ways of being in your school community. Creating a school community where all are seen, heard, and valued for who they really are builds a climate of trust and serves as a great foundation for anything you want to build together. Actively invite and seek to understand families' and students' perspectives, and engage them in contributing to significant initiatives and decisions.
- **Lead with an Asset Mindset:** Seek, recognize, and rely on the strengths of your students, families, and communities. This is a wonderful opportunity to learn from the intelligent, compassionate, and innovative ways in which they have created practices, organizations, and spaces to help them thrive.
- **Support Children in Becoming Self-Sustaining Lifelong Learners:** To tap into your students' innate curiosity, make learning meaningful. Engage with students' real dilemmas and community issues, and invite them to ask deeper questions as much as to seek answers. By learning about and from them, you, in turn, show them your own life-long love of learning.

These guiding principles and mindsets complement DPI's [Guiding Principles for Teaching and Learning](#), [Guiding Principles for Social and Emotional Learning](#), and [Model to Inform Culturally-Responsive Practice](#).

Key Terminology

Throughout this toolkit, there are different terms used to describe immigrant and/or refugee populations, some of which are defined in a specific manner in state or federal law. Table 1 below, taken from the United States Department of Education (USED) Newcomer Tool Kit, describes many of the key terms applicable to this population of students. While not exhaustive, this glossary of terms addresses many of the common terms and definitions used.

Terms Used to Describe Newcomers

“Newcomer” is an umbrella term that includes various categories of immigrants who are born outside of the United States. For example, all immigrants are not necessarily English Learners (ELs), as some are fluent in English, while others speak little or no English. Students identified as ELs require assistance with language acquisition (though more than 40 percent of identified ELs are born in the United States). Some ELs may need help integrating into U.S. culture. Depending on the school district, newcomers of school age who attend public school may be placed in a newcomer program or mainstreamed (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, n.d.c). The following table describes terms used by various entities to describe newcomer populations.

Term	Definition
Asylees	Asylees are individuals who, on their own, travel to the United States and subsequently apply for or receive a grant of asylum. Asylees do not enter the United States as refugees. They may enter as students, tourists, businessmen, or with “undocumented” status (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.a).
English Learner (EL)	An individual (A) who is aged 3 through 21; (B) who is enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary school or secondary school; (C)(i) who was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English; (ii)(I) who is a Native American or Alaska Native, or a native resident of the outlying areas; and (II) who comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual’s level of English language proficiency; or (iii) who is migratory, whose native language is not English, and who comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; and (D) whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding English may be sufficient to deny the individual (i) the ability to meet the challenging state academic standards; (ii) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or (iii) the opportunity to

Term	Definition
	participate fully in society (<i>ESEA</i> , as amended by <i>ESSA</i> , Section 8101[20]).
Foreign born	People who are not U.S. citizens at birth (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).
Immigrant children and youth (Title III)	Immigrant children and youth are those who (A) are aged 3 through 21; (B) were not born in any state; and (C) have not been attending one or more schools in any one or more states for more than for more than 3 full academic years (<i>ESEA</i> , as amended by the <i>No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)</i> , Section 3301[6]).
New American	An all-encompassing term that includes foreign-born individuals (and their children and families) who seek to become fully integrated into their new community in the United States (White House Task Force on New Americans, 2015).
Refugee	A refugee is a person who has fled his or her country of origin because of past persecution or a fear of future persecution based upon race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2015).
Student with limited or interrupted formal education (SIFE/SLIFE)	Students in grades four through 12 who have experienced disruptions in their education in their native countries and/or the United States, and/or are unfamiliar with the culture of schooling (Calderón, 2008).
Unaccompanied Youth	Children who come into the United States from other countries without an adult guardian (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.b).

(Source: United States Department of Education (USED) [Newcomer Tool Kit](#))

Children from Immigrant and Refugee Families in Wisconsin

Children from immigrant and refugee families reside, attend school in, and enrich communities throughout Wisconsin. According to data from the Annie E. Casey Foundation's KidsCount Data Center and summarized by the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF):

- In 2019, 2% of all Wisconsin children under the age of 18 were foreign-born (either naturalized citizens or not citizens of the United States).
- Approximately 12% of all Wisconsin children under the age of 18 live in immigrant families, where they are either foreign-born or live with at least one parent who is foreign-born.
- In 2019, among Wisconsin children residing in immigrant families, parents' regions of origin were Latin America (48%); Asia (31%); Europe (11%), and Africa (4%).

According to the [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees](#) (UNHCR), by the end of 2020, over 84 million people, including more than 35 million children under age 18, have been forcibly displaced from their homes. In 2022, the United States anticipates resettling up to 125,000 refugees (Source: [US Department of State](#)). Many of these families have school-aged children, and will settle, enroll in school, and build lives in Wisconsin.

According to DCF's [Bureau of Refugee Programs](#), which receives and disburses federal grants from the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement and supports refugee services across Wisconsin, over 50 ethnic groups have resettled in communities throughout Wisconsin since 1975. From 2016-2021, Wisconsin received 4,907 arrivals of all ages, the majority of whom were from Burma and the Democratic Republic of Congo, followed by arrivals from Somalia, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine. Further, in 2021-22, it is anticipated that at least 850 individuals will resettle in communities across Wisconsin as part of Operation Allies Welcome, the federal government's effort to support and safely resettle vulnerable Afghans and their families who supported the United States' military, diplomatic, and civic missions in Afghanistan. (Source: DCF)

Toolkit Organization: Four Foundational Areas of Focus

DPI is committed to working with LEAs around the state as they welcome, enroll, and serve all children, including those from immigrant and refugee families. In serving this unique population, DPI has organized this toolkit in chapters to assist school districts in enrolling students and meeting immediate needs. In coming weeks, the toolkit will be expanded to include additional chapters addressing how schools can help meet short-term and long-term needs of these students.

The resources, best practices, and ideas shared within each chapter will focus on four foundational areas:

1. Student Wellness and Mental Health
2. School Environment Preparedness and Climate
3. Family Support and Engagement
4. Language Support and Services

These areas align with national and international research and best practice around fostering strong family, school, and community partnerships to help welcome; educate; build strong relationships with; and communicate with refugee families and students (Source: NASP, 2012). Many strategies discussed here are also applicable with newcomer families of all backgrounds and experiences.

Additional References and Resources

Throughout the toolkit, DPI has included resources and links that may be helpful to school districts in serving children and families who are immigrants or refugees. Each section of the toolkit will include a summary of these links and resources at the end for ease of reference, which will be updated on a periodic basis.

Background information and resources that address multiple aspects of welcoming and serving children from immigrant and refugee families include:

[Newcomer Tool Kit](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/newcomers-toolkit/ncomertoolkit.pdf), United States Department of Education, 2017:
<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oela/newcomers-toolkit/ncomertoolkit.pdf>

[Welcoming, Registering, and Supporting Newcomer Students: A Toolkit for Educators of Immigrant and Refugee Students in Secondary Schools](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/news/immigrant-refugee-toolkit.asp), REL Northwest, February 2021:
<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northwest/news/immigrant-refugee-toolkit.asp>

Wisconsin DPI Immigrant and Refugee website:
<https://dpi.wi.gov/english-learners/immigrants-and-refugees>

Wisconsin DPI Modules 2017: [Creating Safe and Healthy Environments for Immigrant and Refugee Youth](#), Module 1, Educational Rights of Immigrant and Refugee Students

Wisconsin DCF Refugee Programs website: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/refugee>

Miller, G., Thomas, C. and Fruechtenicht, S. "[Engaging Refugee Families as Partners in Their Children's Education.](#)" Number (43/3), National Association of School Psychologists, December 2014,
<https://www.nasponline.org/publications/periodicals/communique/issues/volume-43-issue-4/Engaging-refugee-families-as-partners-in-their-childrenandrsquos-education>
Accessed 3 Dec. 2021.

Last updated: February 2022

Student Enrollment and Registration

Students who are newcomer immigrants and refugees bring a wealth of assets and strengths to their new Wisconsin school communities, including prior educational experiences, diverse culture and lived experience, emerging multilingualism, and more. These strengths can benefit not only the students themselves, but their peers and communities at large. At the same time, these students and families can also face unique barriers that make enrolling and accessing a school community difficult, including language and culture barriers and a history of trauma. Working in partnership with newcomer students and families, districts can lead with an asset-based and culturally-competent approach, starting with the registration and enrollment process and lasting throughout a child's academic career, to ensure that all students and families feel welcomed and valued as important members of their school communities.

This chapter summarizes information to assist school districts as they work to welcome, enroll, and embrace children and families immigrating to Wisconsin, including those who are refugees, and reduce potential barriers that might impede student enrollment and registration among these populations.

Principles to Keep Top of Mind: Belonging and Asset Mindset

Questions to Ask:

- Enrollment is likely to be the first contact between a school and a student and their family. Consider how you can center human warmth and make it a welcoming act. How can you welcome them like potential beloved friends and respected partners in education?
- How can helping someone fill out a form be a more connecting and welcoming experience? Can each touchpoint help build a deeper relationship?
- What can you do to help students and families feel safe, supported, and secure as you collect necessary information?
- Do you know how families see their role in their children's education? Do you know how they want to be involved with the school and what support they may need to play the role they want to play?

- How are you engaging both students and families in a language they can understand? Does your process allow for effective two-way communication? Do parents and caregivers have the support they need to understand the enrollment and registration process, including any forms or policies that require their express support (e.g. policies related to pictures, vaccinations, technology, parent handbooks, etc.)? Do they have the language support not only to understand what is being communicated to them, but also to communicate back to you?

Engaging Caregivers and Family

All parents and caregivers play a critical role in their child's education. When enrolling newcomer immigrant and refugee students, it is critically important to engage with parents and caregivers fully and meaningfully from the start, and to take extra steps to not only assist with completing necessary forms, but also in assisting in the understanding of the content and purpose throughout the process.

Caregivers of immigrant and refugee students who may be identified as English learners play the additional role of serving as an anchor for their child as they adapt to a new linguistic and cultural environment. The initial step is in determining the language(s) caregivers feel most comfortable using when communicating. School districts are required, to the extent practicable, to communicate with parents in a language they can understand. "Schools must communicate information to limited English proficient parents in a language they can understand about any program, service, or activity that is called to the attention of parents who are proficient in English. This includes, but is not limited to: registration and enrollment in school and school programs." (Source: [USED/DOJ Fact Sheet: Information for Limited English Proficient \(LEP\) Parents and Guardians and for Schools and School Districts that Communicate with Them](#))

[Chapter 10 of DPI's English Learner Policy Handbook](#) provides additional information, guidance, and best practices for districts to consider when serving students and families with English language needs.

Legal Requirements and Considerations during Enrollment and Registration

Legal Requirements

The United States Supreme Court held in *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202 (1982) that the Constitution guarantees all children, regardless of immigration status, equal access to a basic public education. The Court held that "denying these children a basic education" would "deny them the ability to live within the structure of our

civic institutions, and foreclose any realistic possibility that they will contribute in even the smallest way to the progress of our Nation.”

The United States Departments of Education (DOE) and Justice (DOJ) have developed several resource and guidance documents to “assist states and school districts in meeting their legal obligations and to ensure that enrollment policies and practices do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, or national origin and do not bar or discourage students’ enrollment based on their or their parents’ actual or perceived immigration status,” including the following:

- [Fact Sheet: Information on the Rights of All Children to Enroll in School](#)
- [Information on the Rights of All Children to Enroll in School: Questions and Answers for States, School Districts, and Parents](#)
- [Confronting Discrimination Based on National Origin or Immigration Status](#)

As part of our state’s commitment to providing a welcoming and inclusive environment for all children, school districts should take proactive steps to educate parents about their children’s rights during enrollment, including all available means for demonstrating residency and student age.

Determining Residency

Wisconsin’s Constitution entitles a pupil to a free education in the school district in which the pupil resides (regardless of where their parent or guardian resides), except students who have reached the age of twenty-one or who have matriculated from an accredited secondary institution. Based on this principle, a resettled refugee child is a resident of the school district in which the refugee lives and is entitled to enroll in that school district, regardless of the child’s or the families’ immigration status.

Proof of Residency Requirements:

There are no specific state laws regarding documentation required to establish proof of residency. Districts are free to set their own policies on such documentation, but must apply these policies equally to all pupils. As noted by USED/DOJ, “**A parent must be permitted to establish residency using any of the alternative methods provided for by state or local law.** States and districts cannot apply different rules, or apply the same rules differently, to children based on their or their parents’ actual or perceived race, color, national origin, citizenship, immigration status, or other impermissible factor. All students must be treated equally.” (Source: [Information on the Rights of All Children to Enroll in School: Questions and Answers for States, School Districts, and Parents](#)).

Districts should review, and update as needed, any local proof of residency requirements that could have the effect of barring or discouraging students who

do not have specific documentation from enrolling in or attending school. For example, while a district may accept a parent's state-issued identification or driver's license as proof of residency, a school district may not require such documentation to establish residency, nor require it for other purposes where such a requirement would unlawfully bar a student whose parents may be undocumented from enrolling in school. For additional information please visit: [Fact Sheet: Information on the Rights of All Children to Enroll in School](#).

Students who are Homeless

A school district **may not deny enrollment to a child who is homeless** because they cannot provide the required documents to establish residency. The federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act delineates educational rights and support for children and youth experiencing homelessness, including guaranteeing immediate access to a free, appropriate public education. Under the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, children and youth who are homeless must be exempted from proof of residency requirements.

Federal law identifies a number of living arrangements under which inhabitants would qualify for purposes of the Act, such as: children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason; living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations; and living in emergency or transitional shelters.

Under McKinney-Vento, school districts must appoint a local liaison to ensure that children experiencing homelessness have the opportunity to succeed academically, including that:

- Children and youth eligible under McKinney Vento are identified;
- They immediately enroll in, and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed in, the schools of the district; and
- They receive educational services for which they are eligible, and referrals to health care services, dental services, mental health services, and other appropriate services.

Additional information regarding the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act is available at www.ed.gov/programs/homeless/guidance.pdf." (Source: [Information on the Rights of All Children to Enroll in School: Questions and Answers for States, School Districts, and Parents](#); 42 U.S.C. § 114341 *et seq.*).

Unaccompanied Youth

Unaccompanied children residing in a Wisconsin school district do not live with a parent or formal legal guardian. At the time the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) places a child with a sponsor, the sponsor typically will not have legal custody or guardianship. While DHS recommends that the sponsor seek guardianship, sponsors are not required to do so. Therefore, unaccompanied children placed by DHS in the care of a sponsor may face additional challenges in establishing formal residency within a district. For purposes of residency determinations, it is not required that a sponsor establish custody or control through a formal guardianship proceeding. Accordingly, lack of evidence of a formal guardianship proceeding should not delay enrollment of an unaccompanied immigrant child if the sponsor's home is the child's permanent residence and the sponsor has full authority and responsibility with respect to the child's support and custody. (Source: Chapter 12, DPI's [English Learner Policy Handbook](#))

When encountering students that do not have guardianship, it is important to connect with the district homeless liaison to determine if this student is experiencing homelessness as they may be able to assist. If such a student is not experiencing homelessness, the LEA should check existing policies or procedures to determine who will take educational guardianship or responsibility for that student.

Immigration, Refugee, or Citizenship Status

A school district **should not ask** about a child's or family's citizenship or immigration status in the course of establishing residency within the district. Per DOJ/USED, "Immigration or citizenship status is not relevant to establishing residency in the district, and inquiring about it in the context of establishing residency is unnecessary and may have a chilling or a discouraging effect on student enrollment." (Source: [Information on the Rights of All Children to Enroll in School: Questions and Answers for States, School Districts, and Parents](#)).

Determining a Student's Age

Similar to proof of residency, district policies may vary on the documents needed to prove a student's age and a variety of documents are generally accepted. For example, documents could include a religious, hospital, or physician's certificate showing date of birth; an entry in a family bible; an adoption record; an affidavit from a parent; a birth certificate; and previously verified school records.

While a district may request a birth certificate or affidavit to verify a student's age, school districts **may not prevent or discourage** a child from enrolling in or attending school because they lack a birth certificate or have records that indicate a foreign place of birth, such as a foreign birth certificate. Districts should consider reviewing their policies and work proactively to make parents aware of alternative methods to demonstrate a student's age. For example, a district

“should publicize that it will use a foreign birth certificate, baptismal record, or alternative document in the same manner that it will use a United States birth certificate, baptismal record, or alternative document: that is, solely to establish the age of a child.”

(Source: [Information on the Rights of All Children to Enroll in School: Questions and Answers for States, School Districts, and Parents](#))

Immunizations and Physical Examination

[Wis. Stat. Sec. \(120.12\(16\)\(a\)\(b\)\)](#), requires school boards to develop and implement a plan to encourage compliance with the state immunization program and requires evidence that students have received specific vaccinations. Waivers may be claimed based on personal conviction, religious beliefs or health reasons. Documentation is needed to support such waivers. (See Wis. Admin. Code §§ DHS 144.04, 144.05).

References and Resources: Student Enrollment and Registration

"Access to Education - Rule of Law | United States Courts."

<https://www.uscourts.gov/educational-resources/educational-activities/access-education-rule-law>. Accessed 3 Jan. 2022.

"Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Guidance"

<https://dpi.wi.gov/homeless/guidance>. Accessed 26 Nov. 2021.

"FACT SHEET: Educational Services for Immigrant Children and"

https://www.theotx.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/USDE_FAQ_uic_Aug2014.pdf. Accessed 26 Nov. 2021.

WI DPI Modules 2017: [Creating Safe and Healthy Environments for Immigrant and Refugee Youth](#), Module 1, Educational Rights of Immigrant and Refugee Students

WI DPI [English Learner Policy Handbook](#)

<https://dpi.wi.gov/english-learners/el-identification-and-placement>

WI DPI [Fostering Innovation in Wisconsin Schools: Beyond Credits and Seat Time and Toward Innovative Practices that Lead to College and Career Readiness](#)
<https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/cal/Fostering%20Innovation%20Credit%20Flexibility%202017.pdf>

“Welcoming, Registering, and Supporting Newcomer Students: A Toolkit for Educators of Immigrant and Refugee Students in Secondary Schools,” REL Northwest, February 2021: <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Project/4628>

USED/DOJ Resources:

[Fact Sheet: Information on the Rights of All Children to Enroll in School](https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/crt/legacy/2014/05/08/plylerfact.pdf)

<https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/crt/legacy/2014/05/08/plylerfact.pdf>

[Information on the Rights of All Children to Enroll in School: Questions and Answers for States, School Districts, and Parents](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/qa-201405.pdf)

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/qa-201405.pdf>

[Confronting Discrimination Based on National Origin or Immigration Status](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/confronting-discrimination-national-origin-immigration-status)

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/confronting-discrimination-national-origin-immigration-status>

English Learners [Dear Colleague Letter](https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf), January 2015;

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf>

[Fact Sheet: Information for Limited English Proficient \(LEP\) Parents and Guardians and for Schools and School Districts that Communicate with Them](#)

Operation Allies Welcome [Dear Colleague Letter](https://oese.ed.gov/files/2022/01/K-12-Resources-for-Afghan-Evacuees.pdf), January 2022

<https://oese.ed.gov/files/2022/01/K-12-Resources-for-Afghan-Evacuees.pdf>

Screening, Identifying, and Connecting Students to Supports and Services

As with any other student, school districts must determine whether newcomer immigrant and refugee students are eligible to participate in programs supported with local, State, and Federal funds, including English learner services and services for children with disabilities. Districts also must work with students and families to determine appropriate school and course placements and connect students with other available services and supports. This chapter provides additional information and best practices for school districts to consider as they work in partnership with students and families at this critical point in their student's educational experience.

Principles: Cultivating Welcoming and Belonging and Leading with an Asset Mindset

Questions to Ask:

- How can you find out more about the assets of the families joining your community? How can you embrace these assets and bring them to the center of your school community?
- What issues are you facing that families/community leaders may have insight into?
- Are community members at the table when you make decisions? Who has the “loudest voice?”
- Does your approach to serving students and families recognize their strengths and assets, including emerging bilingualism or multilingualism, family engagement, and more?
- How are you engaging both students and families in a language they can understand? Do parents and caregivers have the language support they need to understand their legal rights to programs and services?
- Do you have a proactive partnership with students and families to understand a student's educational history and goals, understand and recognize their competencies, and make the most appropriate course and grade placements?

Screening and Identifying Students Eligible for Federal, State and Local Programs and Services

All students are eligible to participate in programs supported with local, State, and Federal funds, including English learner services and services for children with disabilities. However, districts may want to make note of the following requirements during the enrollment and registration process:

Identifying and Serving English Learners

Many students who are immigrants and/or refugees may qualify for English learner services under state and federal law. USED and DOJ have developed collaborative guidance around federal law in this area, detailed in a joint [Dear Colleague letter](#). Furthermore, extensive information about serving English learners in Wisconsin can be found in DPI's [English Learner Policy Handbook](#).

While districts will want to access these resources as part of their overall efforts to serve English learners, districts must adhere to following requirements with respect to identifying and serving English learners **within the first 30 days of enrollment**:

- LEAs are required, to the extent practicable, to communicate with parents or caregivers in a language they can understand.
- Districts must administer a Home Language Survey (HLS) to all newly enrolling students;
- If warranted, districts must conduct English Language proficiency screening;
- Within 30 days of enrollment, districts must make final EL determinations based on the EL proficiency screening and other relevant evidence.
- Districts must inform caregivers of their child's eligibility for participation in a Language Instruction Educational Program (LIEP).

Parental Notification of EL Services

USED has additional requirements for notification to parents of English learners. Districts must provide parents resources that communicate:

- the purpose of the Home Language Survey (HLS) and what it can and cannot be used for;
- how to complete the HLS;
- the steps in the identification process;
- parents' rights to translators and interpreters

- translation and interpreting services should be posted clearly in both English and the most commonly used languages within the district
- if oral interpretation is used, the interpreter should be trained and competent;
- types of services and programming options available to a qualifying student within the district;
- that if a child is eligible for services, a parent/guardian has the right to accept or deny English learner services at any time;
- the rights of English learners with disabilities, including the right to special education and EL support as appropriate; and
- notification of the annual English proficiency assessment.

(Source: [Chapter 10: Parental Engagement and Support, DPI's English Learner Policy Handbook](#))

Additional information about making final EL determinations, including more details about initial and annual parent/guardian notification requirements and sample parent/guardian notification letters can be found in Chapter 3 of DPI's English Learner Policy Handbook.

Identifying and Serving Students with Disabilities

Newcomer students who are immigrants and/or refugees may qualify for services under applicable state and federal disability laws. According to USED:

Under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), State educational agencies (SEAs) and LEAs must ensure that all students who may have a disability (ages 3 through 21) and need services are identified, located, and evaluated to determine eligibility for special education and related services in a timely manner through IDEA's child find process. For children with disabilities who are found eligible through IDEA's evaluation procedures, a free appropriate public education (FAPE) must be made available through the provision of special education and related services and supplementary aids and services in the least restrictive environment and in conformity with the child's individualized education program. IDEA also includes, under Part C, the early intervention program that provides services for children with disabilities, ages birth through two, and their families. Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), which prohibits discrimination based on disability. LEAs must provide FAPE to qualified students who have a disability and must identify and evaluate students who may be in need of services and supports under Section 504. Some students covered by Section 504 may also be eligible to receive FAPE under the IDEA. (Source: Dear Colleague Letter, USED, January 2022)

Students who are newcomer immigrants to Wisconsin, including those who are refugees, and are suspected of having a disability as defined under Wis. Stat. § 115.76(5) & 34 CFR § 300.8, must be evaluated to determine if the student has a disability and needs special education and related services under IDEA. All children in need of special education and related services must be identified, located, and evaluated in a timely manner by the school district in which the child resides.

Special education evaluations may not be delayed because of a student's limited English language proficiency or the student's participation in a language instruction educational program ([English Learner Policy Handbook Ch. 11 Els with Disabilities](#)). When evaluating a student for special education, a school district must ensure that assessments and other evaluation materials are selected and administered so as not to be discriminatory on a racial or cultural basis, are provided and administered in the student's native language (the language normally used by the student in the home or school), and are in the form most likely to yield accurate information on what the student knows and can do academically, developmentally, and functionally, unless it is clearly not feasible to do so. (Source: 34 CFR § 300.304(c)).

Before administering additional assessments as part of the evaluation, the school district must provide prior written notice and obtain consent from the parent of the student. The notice must be written in understandable language and provided in the native language of the parent unless it is clearly not feasible to do so. If the native language of the parent is not a written language, the district must take steps to ensure the notice is translated orally or by other means to the parent in their native language and to ensure the parent understands the content of the notice. The district must maintain written evidence that these requirements have been met. (Source: § 300.503(c).)

A school district must take steps to ensure that one or both parents of a child with a disability are present at each IEP Team meeting or are afforded the opportunity to participate. This includes arranging for an interpreter for parents whose native language is other than English to ensure the parent understands the proceedings of the IEP team meeting. (Source: 34 CFR § 300.322.)

Limited English proficiency cannot be the basis for determining a child to be a child with a disability. It must be ruled out as a primary factor affecting a child's performance before determining that a child is eligible for special education services under the category of specific learning disability. (Source: 34 CFR § 300.306(b)(1)(iii)). For a child suspected of having a specific learning disability, the documentation of the determination of eligibility must contain a statement of the determination of the group concerning the effects of cultural factors or limited English proficiency on the child's achievement level. (Source: 34 CFR § 300.311).

When developing an eligible student's individual education program (IEP), the IEP team must consider the language needs of the student. (Source: 300.324(a)(2)(ii)). The district must provide students with disabilities with both the language assistance and special education services they are entitled to under federal law. The IEP team must determine if a student requires interpreting services to access their special education services. The nature and type of interpreting services required for students who are limited in English proficiency must ensure a student can access, engage with, and make progress toward their IEP goals and in the general education curriculum.

[Chapter 11 of DPI's English Learner Policy Handbook](#) outlines legal requirements, special education evaluations, students with specific disability category needs, and a checklist for IEP teams. DPI has also developed a webpage to support [Special Education and Multilingual Learners](#), where districts can access additional information and resources, including trainings and webinars, that may be useful when working with multilingual students and families who are immigrants and refugees.

Finally, the USED Office of English Language Acquisition has devoted a chapter in its [English Learner Toolkit](#) to address assessment and IEP development among English learners with disabilities: [Chapter 6: Tools and Resources for Addressing English Learners with Disabilities](#).

Identifying and Serving Students who are Homeless

As noted in Chapter 1, under McKinney-Vento, school districts must appoint a local liaison to ensure that children experiencing homelessness have the opportunity to succeed academically, including that:

- Children and youth eligible under McKinney Vento are identified;
- They immediately enroll in, and have a full and equal opportunity to succeed in, the schools of the district; and
- They receive educational services for which they are eligible, and referrals to health care services, dental services, mental health services, and other appropriate services.

Additional information regarding the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act is available at www.ed.gov/programs/homeless/guidance.pdf." (Source: [Information on the Rights of All Children to Enroll in School: Questions and Answers for States, School Districts, and Parents](#); 42 U.S.C. § 11431 *et seq.*).

Identifying Eligibility for Other Supports and Services

In addition to the federal programs noted above, districts must identify whether a newcomer immigrant or refugee student is eligible for any other federal, state, or local program in the same manner that they would for any other student.

Examples of these could include:

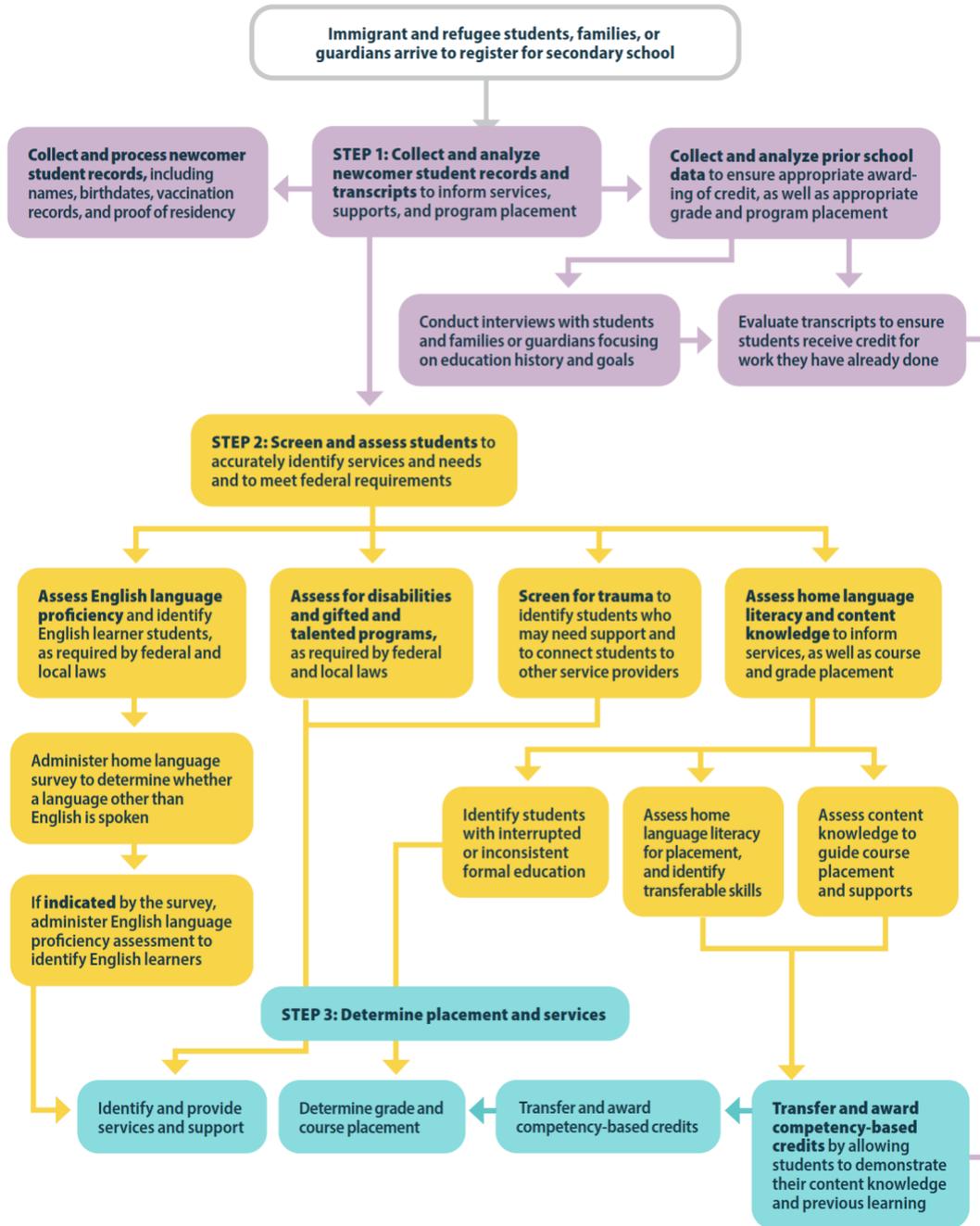
- Appropriate services for social emotional wellness and support to build resilience;
- Assessing prior learning and content knowledge to determine course placement, including gifted and talented programs; and
- Connection to extra/co-curricular programs, out-of-school time programs, wrap-around services, and any activities shared within the schools for all students and families (e.g. summer programs, athletic opportunities, public library events, community events, etc.).

Determining Placements, Services, and Supports

As school districts work with students and families from immigrant and refugee backgrounds during the registration process, care should be given to recognizing the many assets and talents these students bring to their education and their school communities. For example, in proactive partnership with students and families, districts can take particular care in identifying proper course and grade placements, recognizing competencies, award appropriate credit, and providing other necessary support to ensure an excellent and equitable education.

In the spirit of leading from an asset-based and culturally-competent mindset, the [Regional Educational Laboratory \(REL\) Northwest developed a toolkit](#) specifically to “help educators identify and use research-based policies, practices, and procedures for welcoming and registering newcomer immigrant and refugee students who are attending secondary schools in the United States and for supporting them once they are in school.” While targeted toward secondary schools, the research and resources provided are helpful as educators work to support newcomer students of any age. Further, REL Northwest developed a [short infographic](#) to accompany the information in the toolkit, included as Figure 1 below:

Figure 1. A summary of the registration process for newcomer immigrant and refugee students



(Source: [Welcoming, Registering, and Supporting Newcomer Students: A Toolkit for Educators of Immigrant and Refugee Students in Secondary Schools](#), REL Northwest, February 2021)

Family Intake Interviews

The REL Northwest toolkit also provides guidance and best practices around family engagement in every step of the process, including the need for family intake interviews. Family interviews are particularly critical when documents, transcripts, and other academic records are unavailable:

“In addition to the standard registration information collected from all students, districts can use family intake interviews to obtain rich information on newcomer immigrant and refugee students. Although intake interview structures and questions can vary, focusing on students’ education history and goals can provide important and actionable information... Interviews can be especially important when academic records are missing. Schools could consider re-creating these histories through a combination of interviews with families and students and content and language assessments.” (Source: [Welcoming, Registering, and Supporting Newcomer Students: A Toolkit for Educators of Immigrant and Refugee Students in Secondary Schools](#), REL Northwest, February 2021)

Considerations for Newcomer Immigrant and Refugee Students

Chapter 12 of DPI’s English Learner Policy Handbook details requirements and considerations specific to newcomer immigrant and migrant students, including refugees and students with limited or interrupted formal education. This resource outlines applicable laws, policies, and best practices, including the following excerpts below:

Flexibility for Newcomer Students

Newcomer students are recently arrived English Learners who have been enrolled in U.S. schools for less than 12 cumulative months. These students are granted some flexibility with regard to federally mandated testing. Newcomer students may be given a one-time exemption on the English/Language Arts sections of any federally mandated assessments. These are the assessments found within the Wisconsin State Assessment System (WSAS).

If an English Learner is at the very beginning of their English language development, they may receive English language instruction in lieu of a general education class. In such cases their EL grade may substitute for the class that they miss, provided that those services are provided by a licensed educator.

Newcomer programs must be short-term programs, not lasting more than one school year, designed to quickly improve students’ English proficiency so that they may more rapidly access the core curriculum. (Source: Chapter 12, DPI’s [English Learner Policy Handbook](#))

Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE/SIFE)

Students from immigrant and/or refugee backgrounds may have experienced disruptions in their formal schooling prior to enrollment in a U.S. school. These students, especially in the higher grades, may be below grade level in some or all subjects when they enter a school district. Students with a limited formal education may need additional time to build critical skills that a regular matriculation age of eighteen might not provide. Students are eligible to attend school within the district in which they reside, except students who have reached the age of twenty-one or who have matriculated from an accredited secondary institution.

Students coming from some countries may finish compulsory education in their mid-teens, and may have a certificate or diploma stating this. In addition, some countries provide diplomas or certificates of attendance for individual grades, with formal schooling ending prior to 12th grade. Due to this, the way U.S. schools discuss graduation and diplomas may differ from how parents of newcomer students understand the terms. Care must be taken that students are not excluded from education due to such a misunderstanding.

Moreover, students with limited or interrupted formal education face challenges that other English Learners do not. These challenges may derive from the specific circumstances of a student's academic background beyond English language proficiency, including, but not limited to:

- Lack of access to school;
- Differences in scope and sequences of curriculum;
- Exposure to a spectrum of education settings;
- Different school behavior/cultural expectations; and/or
- Limited exposure to technology.

Social and emotional challenges can also arise from the conditions that caused the student to have interrupted schooling, and consideration should be given to their unique socio-emotional needs (poverty, post-traumatic stress disorder, family separation or reunification, etc.). Recommendations for supporting overall student wellness and mental health is more extensively addressed in later chapters.

(Source: Chapter 12, DPI's [English Learner Policy Handbook](#))

Ensuring Appropriate Grade Placements

In order to ensure that students with limited or interrupted formal education have the opportunity to meet grade-level standards within a reasonable period of time, districts must provide an appropriately specialized program to meet their needs.

The content of this program must relate to the core curriculum, be credit-bearing toward graduation or promotion requirements, and be able to demonstrate students' ability to catch up to age-appropriate standards. (Source: USED/DOJ [Dear Colleague Letter](#), January 2015)

Students with limited or interrupted formal education may not be placed in a school that does not instruct students of their age. For example, placing a 16-year old student with limited or interrupted formal education in middle school, for example, would not permit them to meet graduation requirements within a reasonable amount of time. (Sources: USED/DOJ Dear Colleague Letter, January 2015; Chapter 12, DPI's English Learner Policy Handbook)

Creating Appropriate Academic Plans and School Schedules

School staff should form a team to craft a schedule that addresses all academic and social-emotional areas of need, and in the case of high school students, create a long-term plan that addresses credit accrual and graduation. The members of this team should:

- include staff from representative areas of the school (e.g. EL teacher, school counselor, school social worker, administrator, content teacher);
- meet regularly to discuss the student's progress; and
- engage parents/guardians about the plan and the implications of the academic plan on the student's post-secondary options. (Source: Chapter 12, DPI's [English Learner Policy Handbook](#))

DPI has created a document that addresses flexibility in creating academic plans for students in unique circumstances. The document [Fostering Innovation in Wisconsin Schools: Beyond Credits and Seat Time and Toward Innovative Practices that Lead to College and Career Readiness](#) includes information about project-based learning, evidence-based credit, and other alternative ways of demonstrating proficiency that might be suitable for students with limited or interrupted schooling.

Further, districts may want to consult Chapter 13 of DPI's English Learner Policy Handbook, which pertains to unique situations and circumstances - including enrollment beyond age eighteen - as they develop academic plans to support credit accrual and graduation for immigrant and refugee students.

References and Resources: Screening, Identification, and Connecting Students to Programs and Services

"Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) Guidance"

<https://dpi.wi.gov/homeless/guidance>. Accessed 26 Nov. 2021.

"FACT SHEET: Educational Services for Immigrant Children and"

https://www.theotx.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/USDE_FAQ_uic_Aug2014.pdf. Accessed 26 Nov. 2021.

WI DPI Modules 2017: [Creating Safe and Healthy Environments for Immigrant and Refugee Youth](#), Module 1, Educational Rights of Immigrant and Refugee Students

WI DPI [English Learner Policy Handbook](#)

<https://dpi.wi.gov/english-learners/el-identification-and-placement>

WI DPI [Fostering Innovation in Wisconsin Schools: Beyond Credits and Seat Time and Toward Innovative Practices that Lead to College and Career Readiness](#)

<https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/cal/Fostering%20Innovation%20Credits%20Flexibility%202017.pdf>

"Welcoming, Registering, and Supporting Newcomer Students: A Toolkit for Educators of Immigrant and Refugee Students in Secondary Schools," REL Northwest, February 2021: <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/rel/Project/4628>

USED/DOJ Resources:

[Fact Sheet: Information on the Rights of All Children to Enroll in School](#)

<https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/crt/legacy/2014/05/08/plylerfact.pdf>

[Information on the Rights of All Children to Enroll in School: Questions and Answers for States, School Districts, and Parents](#)

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/qa-201405.pdf>

[Confronting Discrimination Based on National Origin or Immigration Status](#)

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/confronting-discrimination-national-origin-immigration-status>

English Learners [Dear Colleague Letter](#), January 2015;

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-el-201501.pdf>

Operation Allies Welcome [Dear Colleague Letter](#), January 2022

<https://oese.ed.gov/files/2022/01/K-12-Resources-for-Afghan-Evacuees.pdf>

Last updated: February 2022

Meeting Immediate Needs of Immigrant and Refugee Students and Families

As immigrant and refugee families resettle into local communities and enroll in school, there are specific needs that should be supported by schools and districts. Taking action to support these needs will ensure the start of a successful school, student, and family relationship. This chapter outlines immediate needs which should be supported prior to and throughout the student and family's early encounters with the school or district.

Principles to Keep Top of Mind: Belonging and Asset Mindset

- How is student and family voice integrated into the supports provided?
- Does your approach to serving students and families recognize their strengths and assets, including emerging bilingualism or multilingualism?
- Does your approach incorporate language support?
- Does your approach recognize differences in cultural contexts?
- Are you looking to your families, students, and community as wise and compassionate leaders to co-create a learning environment that centers their well-being and positive mental health?

Student Wellness and Mental Health

The immediate wellness and mental health needs of students and families arriving from other countries is anchored in developing meaningful relationships with the community, school staff, and students' peers.

The strategies below are primarily universal strategies that are meaningful for all students but will be essential for new students. Also included are systems-level actions that are necessary for a fully functioning comprehensive school mental health approach that will support every student.

Keep in mind that all of these strategies and approaches must acknowledge the following:

- None of these will be effective if there is no language support.
- Wellness and mental health have different meanings and understanding across cultures.

- Student experiences vary, even within broad cultural contexts. Some students may have had formal school experiences, and some may not. Some students and their families may have had some exposure to mental health resources, and some may not.
- While some students may need to access treatment resources, these strategies will be necessary to create trust and understanding which will be critical in the event that a referral to a provider is necessary.
- Center all of these resources and supports in asset-based thinking rather than identifying and responding to perceived deficits.

Universal strategies to welcome new immigrant and refugee families into school communities

- Make meaningful connections with the student.
- Be welcoming.
- Create an environment that is safe and where they feel valued. Be on alert for bullying behavior.
- Be curious but respectful about their culture, traditions, hobbies, and family.
- Allow siblings to be together when possible.
- Explicitly show students and families how school works by sharing the usual routines of the school and classroom. Consistently implementing these routines will help students to feel comfortable and safe because the environment will be more predictable. It will also help them to explicitly learn what is expected of them.
- Connect students to classmates, other adults in the building.
 - Identify a peer to be a mentor.
 - Plan for peers to be engaged with the new student during more unstructured times.
 - Have a peer do a building tour and introduce the student to others in the building (the admins, librarian, other teachers, office staff, etc).
- Connect families to other families. Offer a mentor family with similar backgrounds or experience, if possible.
- Learn to recognize signs of stress, anxiety, and depression. Students will have a range of social and emotional responses to their experience. Some

may experience signs and symptoms of trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and some may not.

- Pay attention to physical complaints as well as behavioral cues to monitor students' wellbeing. School nurses can monitor physical complaints of the new students to check for frequent and/or persistent reported problems.
- Recognize that student wellness and mental health are experienced on a continuum and will vary from individual to individual. Avoid making assumptions about what a student should feel or how a student should act.
- Be aware of any potential triggers that students may experience such as loud noises, physical touch, and interacting with strangers. When possible, notify students in advance of these.
- Focus on universal social and emotional wellness support. Provide comprehensive school wide social and emotional wellness programming such as mental health literacy and social and emotional learning to provide skills to all students.
- Avoid the use of social and emotional behavioral health screening tools. In addition to these tools not being norm referenced on refugee and immigrant populations, the behaviors seen may be connected to the challenges of adjusting to new environments and experiences. Appropriate social, emotional, and behavioral services can be provided without the use of a screening tool. Interviews with students, families, and staff, as well as observations can all help determine needed supports and services.
- Develop a referral pathway and know how to activate it, in order to ensure that all students can access the mental health services they need when they need them. Develop a plan for how this process will be used with immigrant and refugee students and their families.
- Collaborate with community mental health providers and refugee resettlement organizations to provide useful information to families about the mental health and wellness services available and how they are accessed.
- Infuse the trauma sensitive schools core principles of safety, trust, choice, collaboration, empowerment, and cultural responsiveness into all programs and practices.

School Environment Preparedness and Climate

Supporting students and families transition into, awareness of, and understanding of the local educational system is anchored in creating and sustaining a strong relationship and trust. The strategies below are primarily universal strategies that are meaningful for all students but will be essential for newcomer students and their families.

Orientation to School Environment for Student and Family: Before Day 1 of attendance

- Set up an orientation meeting with families and students.
 - Introduce key staff members.
 - Learn about family and student(s) through exploring experience, educational background, preferences, and name pronunciations.
 - Identify ways to partner with the family in supporting the student for successful transition into the school environment.
- Provide in-person tour of school and learning spaces.
 - Introduce instructional staff directly supporting the student including roles.
 - Identify and explain who will be the key communicator with the family (point of contact).
 - Visit various learning spaces with explanations of the purpose of each space, etc.
 - Review/preview of a typical school day, including the daily schedule.
 - Explain emergency procedures, what emergency drills look, sound, and feel like.
 - Discuss norms of school environment; ie. radio usage, bell system, school/community guests expectations, outlets for questions and concerns, etc.
- Provide professional learning to staff.
 - Create culturally responsive and welcoming practices; ie. greetings, approaches, body language, holiday/religious practices, diet, etc.
 - Train in Trauma Sensitivity to develop an awareness of impact of visual and auditory responses within the schooling environment (ie. fire alarms, buzzers, radios, body language, phrasing, etc.)
 - Educate on cultural differences and norms.
 - Make translation and interpretation services and access available.

- Explain what to expect the first few weeks of the student's transition into school (Stages of Adjustment - Honeymoon, Hesitancy, Humor, Home)
- Provide learning opportunities to students.
 - Welcome new classmates.
 - Understand nuances of the new classmate's culture.
 - Explain proper name pronunciation.
 - Develop ways to welcome and engage with a new student, etc.
- Prepare kitchen and nutrition staff for any dietary needs.

Best practices in supporting students and families

- Connect with families prior to day one of attendance.
- Strive to translate all materials, oral conversations, emails, etc. (all communication) to the families' native/preferred language(s).
- Establish translation and interpretation services for first encounter with the family and subsequent encounters going forward.
- Welcoming Practices
 - Check your assumptions.
 - Seek background cultural understanding of immigrant students.
 - Transform the visual environment of your school to reflect acceptance of diverse cultures.
 - Create 'potential spaces' that remind a person of the culture or place they left behind (ie. inclusion of foods, community activities, or other familiar activities, like sports or games).
 - Be prepared to practice cultural reciprocity through opening two-way channels of respectful communication.
 - Include student languages in all school spaces (ie. school libraries, classroom libraries, etc.).
 - Be mindful of scheduling considerations (ie. cultural and/or religious holidays).

Day 1 of attendance and beyond

- Meet and greet students as they enter the building.
- Early on, support with traveling the building, changing classes, etc.
- Communicate with family regarding student safety and security.
- Consider assigning buddy system for navigating the school day.

Family Support and Engagement

When welcoming newcomer students from immigrant and refugee families into a new school community, it is essential to engage with parents and caregivers fully and meaningfully. Caregivers of immigrant and refugee students who may be identified as English learners play the additional role of serving as an anchor for their child as they adapt to a new linguistic and cultural environment.

Building a strong bond between families and schools

While a cornerstone of creating a partnership with parents and caregivers of immigrant and refugee students is translation and interpretation (where needed), and ensuring effective two-way communication, there are many additional ways to engage families. Some specific examples include:

- Identify specific outreach activities that can connect families to their children's schools, such as inviting parents and families to volunteer in the school.
- Encourage teachers and families to work together to help children integrate their cultural and linguistic traditions into school assignments and other curricular and extracurricular activities.

[WIDA](#), an organization within the University of Wisconsin-Madison which supports “students, families, educators and administrators with high-quality, research-based tools and resources, dedicated to language development for multilingual learners” has multiple resources that schools and districts may find valuable in working with immigrant and refugee families, including their Focus Bulletin ABCs of Family Engagement.

USED has also released a [Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Families and the Community as Partners in Education](#). This toolkit provides resources for family engagement in diverse communities, and it is designed to help school staff examine their own backgrounds and cultural experiences as a means to build a bridge between their experiences and those of others in their community.

Identify and connect families to community resources and partner organizations

As referenced in prior chapters, the [Regional Educational Laboratory \(REL\) Northwest developed a toolkit](#) specifically to “help educators identify and use research-based policies, practices, and procedures for welcoming and registering newcomer immigrant and refugee students who are attending secondary schools in the United States and for supporting them once they are in school.” Schools and districts may want to reference this resource as they welcome and support immigrant and refugee students and families, including through the following actions:

- Help families connect to community and partner organizations for support.
 - New immigrant and refugee families “might feel more comfortable becoming involved in their child’s education through community organizations, social networks, or religious organizations rather than through school-based networks and activities, such as parent–teacher associations. Educators and administrators might wish to reach out to such organizations, including resettlement agencies.” (Source: [Welcoming, Registering, and Supporting Newcomer Students: A Toolkit for Educators of Immigrant and Refugee Students in Secondary Schools](#), REL Northwest, February 2021)
 - DCF’s Bureau of Refugee Programs receives grants from the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement and funds a variety of local organizations across Wisconsin to provide services to refugees. A list of Wisconsin’s [Refugee Resettlement Agencies and other DCF-contracted refugee service providers](#) and other [partner agencies and organizations](#) can be found on DCF’s website.

- Assist families in connecting to wraparound services that they may not have access to at school.
 - “Some community partners offer wraparound services that include securing housing, food, clothing, health care, language learning services, and employment... Community organizations can help schools reach out to newcomer immigrant and refugee families by providing resources that schools might not have at their disposal, such as interpretation and cultural liaisons. In addition, these organizations can help schools arrange to hold meetings for families in local community centers, religious institutions, community rooms in housing complexes, and local libraries.” (Source: [Welcoming, Registering, and Supporting Newcomer Students: A Toolkit for Educators of Immigrant and Refugee Students in Secondary Schools](#), REL Northwest, February 2021)

Language Support and Services

Many newcomer immigrant and refugee students and families are English learners. As districts welcome, enroll, and serve immigrant and refugee families, providing language support and services, including translation and interpretation services as well as language development, is critical.

As described in earlier chapters, districts have legal obligations under state and federal law to identify and provide services to students who are English learners. All districts must have a non-discriminatory way to identify students for whom a lack of English proficiency may be a barrier to their academic success. (Source: [20 U.S.C. § 1703 \(f\)](#)). USED and DOJ have developed guidance around federal law in this area in a joint [Dear Colleague letter](#) and a companion [English Learner Toolkit](#) that outlines legal obligations for English learners. Furthermore, extensive information about serving English learners in Wisconsin schools can be found in DPI's [English Learner Policy Handbook](#).

Strategies to Identify and Serve English Learners

- Review current procedures for parent/caregiver language support with staff (teachers, specialists, etc.).
 - Ensure staff know which families require interpretation and/or translation services and understand procedures for two-way communication.
 - LEAs are required, to the extent practicable, to communicate with parents and caregivers in a language they can understand.
- Administer the home language survey; screen for English proficiency; and identify English learners within 30 days of enrollment.
 - Work with families to complete a home language survey. Districts must administer a [Home Language Survey \(HLS\)](#) to all newly enrolling students;
 - If the home language survey indicates a need for English learner services, administer [English Language proficiency screening](#);
 - Based on the results of the screening and any other relevant evidence, make final [EL determinations](#).
 - Notify caregivers of placement in Language Instruction Educational Programs and of their rights surrounding those services. (Source: DPI [English Learner Policy Handbook](#), Chapter 3, pg 2)
- Consider assessing a student's proficiency in languages other than English, especially a student's home language.

- “Literacy skills in a student’s home language are a good predictor of a student’s ability to gain literacy skills in a second language” and can guide placement and instructional decisions.” (Source: [Welcoming, Registering, and Supporting Newcomer Students: A Toolkit for Educators of Immigrant and Refugee Students in Secondary Schools](#), REL Northwest, February 2021)
- Increase school-wide capacity to support English learners across school staff.
 - Provide specific and ongoing opportunities and professional development for staff beyond EL and bilingual professionals, such as other content teachers, instructional coaches, specialists, school counselors and social workers, as well as principals, and other administrators.
 - Incorporate support for English learners into professional learning plans as appropriate.
- Ensure effective parental engagement is occurring, including regular meetings.
 - Under federal law, districts are required to conduct effective outreach to parents/caregivers of English learners, including having regular meetings.
 - Districts can view this requirement as a catalyst to consider their parent engagement strategies as a whole, and to create a plan that clearly documents and explains the ways they communicate with parents/caregivers and how they measure the effectiveness of these communications. (Source: [Chapter 10, DPI English Learner Policy Handbook](#))
 - USED has provided substantial guidance and tools to assist in meeting this requirement in [Chapter 10 of the EL Toolkit](#). (Source: [Chapter 10, DPI English Learner Policy Handbook](#))

References and Resources

WI DCF [Refugee Resettlement Agencies and Other DCF-Contracted Refugee Service Providers](#)

WI DPI Modules 2017 - [Creating Safe and Healthy Environments for Immigrant and Refugee Youth](#), Immigrant and Refugee Youth: Module 3

[WI DPI webpage: Trauma Sensitive Schools Online Professional Development](#)

WI DPI Modules 2017 - [Creating Safe and Healthy Environments for Immigrant and Refugee Youth](#), Immigrant and Refugee Youth: Module 2

WI DPI's [English Learner Policy Handbook](#)

[Welcoming, Registering, and Supporting Newcomer Students: A Toolkit for Educators of Immigrant and Refugee Students in Secondary Schools](#), REL Northwest, February 2021

[WIDA Focus Bulletin: ABCs of Family Engagement](#)

[Toolkit of Resources for Engaging Families and the Community as Partners in Education](#), USED IES and REL Pacific, 2016

Last updated: February 2022